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Who Is *Súnułqaz'*?: A Salish Quest

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Abstract. Lillooet traditional cosmology recognizes a supernatural being called *súnułqaz'*, which manifests itself as a gigantic animal, usually a serpent. A being with an etymologically related name and similar attributes is recognized by a number of other Salish cultures, namely, Straits, Halkomelem, and Squamish, while a similar animal, called by unrelated names, appears in yet other Salish cultures. This article discusses the various functions of this being in those Salish cultures where it occurs, as well as the etymological history of the name *súnułqaz'*, and serves as a contribution to cryptozoology and the study of beings not recognized in the western taxonomic canon.

1. Introduction. In the early 1980s, while doing fieldwork on the Lillooet language in Mount Currie, British Columbia, I was told by one of my consultants, the late Charles Mack Seymour ("Charlie Mack"), about a supernatural being called *súnułqaz'*. Charlie described *súnułqaz'* as a powerful spirit (similar to the type that the Lillooet call *hi?*), which manifests itself as a gigantic animal, usually a serpent. The existence of this being was confirmed by other consultants,[1] who also classed it as a kind of *hi?*, a more familiar kind of being that typically inhabits bodies of water. A *hi?* does not have to manifest itself visibly, but one can still be bothered by it and, for example, vomit after the encounter. When a *hi?* does manifest itself, as a serpent or a *c'anáz'* 'bullhead', one has to talk to it. The presence of a *hi?* can be divined when waters turn rough or loons take flight (for the connection between this type of supernatural being and waterfowl, see section 2.1). My information on *súnułqaz'* was recorded from Mount Currie consultants only; speakers of the northern dialect (in the communities of Lillooet, Fountain, and Pavilion) seem to have no knowledge of this being.

Section 2 presents the various names and functions of *súnułqaz'* that we have been able to collect for those Salish cultures with etymologically related names for this being. In section 3, we draw a number of preliminary conclusions about *súnułqaz'* with regard to culture and etymology. Section 4 discusses those Salish cultures that recognize a being with the same or similar functions as *súnułqaz'*, but by different names. Section 5 discusses the position of *súnułqaz'* within Salish beliefs about snakes in general, while section 6 offers a wider perspective on this phenomenon, with regard to western and nonwestern natural classifications.

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2. Distribution of *súnułqaz'* through the Salish language area. In this section, we discuss the characteristics of *súnułqaz'* in those Salish cultures with etymologically related terms, namely, Straits, Halkomelem, and Squamish.

2.1. Straits. Stern, in his 1934 study of the Lummi,[2] describes a being called "Sinetlqi" in the context of a young man's spiritual training:

> If the youth sees or hears unusual things he will remain at a lake or stream for days and dive to the very bottom seeking that spirit which will make him a great man in wealth or skill. Deep in the waters is the home of spirits who can transform themselves into diverse shapes. The most important of these spirits is Sinetlqi, the spirit who can adopt varied forms such as that of a serpent, a mallard duck, a short log or a two-headed lizard. He has lizards as slaves on the borders of streams to warn of the coming of intruders and to frighten them away. Cranes also are his slaves, giving alarm to anyone's approach by frightful squawking.
>
> It is necessary for the youth who ventures near the home of Sinetlqi to have observed careful restrictions and to be clean in every way. If he has had sexual intercourse before he makes this visit, he will not survive. As he dives in the water, if he hopes to be successful in reaching the home of the spirit, he must never turn about. For if he sees the spirit and turns in his effort to escape his body twists in the direction of his turning, breaking his bones and causing his death. If he wishes to leave the place for any reason, he must move backward keeping his eyes set on the spirit until he is out of sight. He then makes further preparations by more rigid training and dives down into the water again at that place, acting as if he feared nothing and were merely going to his own home. When he reaches the home of the spirit, he usually faints from excitement and exhaustion. While he is in the swoon, the spirit speaks to him and grants him the gift he deserves or advises him where to go to seek the spirit suited to his ambitions. He takes whatever instruction, advice or gift the spirit offers and goes forth seeking deeper experience from other spirits. The youth acquiring the friendship of Sinetlqi usually becomes a great medicine man. [Stern 1934:19]

Later, Stern adds the following information (using the spelling <sinatlqi>):[3]

> One medicine man upon returning to his village after *sinatlqi* had appeared to him as a land otter in a spirit experience, turned some dry clams and fern roots prepared for him by his sister for food, into frogs and snakes, and then restored them. [1934:77]

Suttles (1987) provides the following description:

> Once years ago I was eliciting ethnozoological information from an aged Lummi friend, Julius Charles. I had gone through Dalquests's *Mammals of Washington*, asking about everything from shrews to elk, and when I had finished Julius said something like: "There's another animal you haven't got there. They used to be around here but they've become pretty scarce and the white people have never caught one and put it in a zoo. It had a big body in the middle and two heads, one at each side. It lived in swamps where it swam about. But it could

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> turn into a couple of mallards and fly away. It had three kinds of noises—one was like the laugh of a loon, one like the hoot of a hound, and one like the hissing of a mallard drake. It was a great thing to get so you'd become an Indian doctor."
>
> This "animal" was called a *sʔínəɬqəy*. Such fierce and powerful things that were seen by men "training" to become "doctors" (in anthropological jargon "questing for shamanistic visions") were *sƛ'éləqəm*. Grizzly bears and killer whales were also good to get a doctor's power from. But any "animal" might be referred to as a *sƛ'éləqəm*. [1987:75–76]

Although the information I recorded from my Lillooet consultants is less complete than the information collected by Stern from the Lummi fifty years earlier, there are remarkable similarities: aside from the general appearance of the spirit being, there is the notion that it cannot be shied away from (as one of my Mount Currie consultants noted, one has "to talk to it"), and there is a connection with water fowl as either manifestations of the spirit or as its guards. The term *sƛ'éləqəm* used by Suttles is a rather common Coast Salish term for "supernatural being" or "power animal" (cf. Galloway [1980:95], for Halkomelem; Kuipers [1967:291], for Squamish).

Duff (1952:119) mentions "Sinetlqi" as "known to at least the Songhees and the Lummi," but he does not mention his source for Songhees (a dialect of Northern Straits and, as such, closely related to Lummi).

2.2. Halkomelem. Extensive references to the spirit animal under discussion here are found in a number of treatises on the Halkomelem. For example, Jenness has the following remarks on the "two-headed snake" in his description of the faith of Old Pierre, a Katzie (Downriver Halkomelem) Indian: "The man who possessed this guardian spirit could cure a certain form of paralysis, which the Indians attributed to stepping near a two-headed snake. In dancing he smeared his face with charcoal" (1955:60). Jenness then describes a series of events in which a young man, when duckhunting, hears an animal quacking like a mallard, shoots it, then finds out that it is a two-headed snake "nearly 20 feet long and as thick as a large log" (1955:60). The man falls into a swoon, twisted in a coil, and is found by his people who revive him with the help of certain medicines and a certain bark that they scrape, burn, and smear on his face and body, following his semi-conscious instructions, which he has received from the snake. Having been cured of his paralysis, the man is now able to help others with the same affliction, and he acquires the two-headed snake as his guardian spirit.

Jenness gives the Katzie word for this being as *síɬqəy'*, obviously a syncopated form of what is <sinetlqi> or *sʔínəɬqəy* with the Lummi. The Upriver form, given by Galloway in Wells (1987), is <sílhqey> or <sí:lhqey> (*síɬqəy* or *sí:ɬqəy* in standard phonemic orthography), in free, or perhaps idiolectal, variation. Wells (1987:54–55, 84–85, 156–57) gives various accounts of *síɬqəy*, one detailing an

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encounter between *sí:ɬqəy* and a man identified as "Alphonse," with *sí:ɬqəy* described as follows:

> When it comes out of the water, the pond or the lake, just a big round ball. And one head will come out one side of the ball, and the other head will come out the other. And on the back were round, not diamond shape, all round. The body was black, the main body, but this here was red and white, the centre dark. [Wells 1987:54–55]

An accompanying illustration indeed shows the spots on *sí:ɬqəy* as round, not diamond-shaped, the way that they are in another illustration (1987:166). Both drawings are by Wells, the first authenticated by Bob Joe, Wells's consultant for this story.

Bob Joe provides another account of an encounter with *sí:ɬqəy* (Wells 1987: 55), this time involving two men, Bob Joe's maternal grandfather, Isaac Kipp, and his paternal grandfather, George. The appearance of *sí:ɬqəy* is signaled by a large duck rising from a lake. The duck then rises into the air followed by a large black ball. George is instructed by Isaac not to turn around, lest he get sick. By the time the ball has disappeared in the air, the water has risen to where the two men are standing. Both wade back, but feel queasy after they have made it to a higher bank. They chew plugs of smoking tobacco to suppress their nausea, but to no avail. Both vomit: "And what they threw up was little chunks of stick, what you find in the bottom of a pond. How'd that come in there?" Interestingly, the lake is described as being quite shallow and, thus, normally not suited for animals to hide themselves.

Dan Milo, another Upriver consultant, recounts a story (Wells 1987:84–85) of a man who encounters a two-headed serpent and is instructed by the latter to chew a certain kind of grass and, when the serpent hollers, to spit it into the serpent's mouth in order to kill it. This the man does (first grabbing the serpent in order to make it squeal), then he leaves the carcass to rot. When only the bones are left, he burns these, using the "charcoal" that is left of the bones to paint a picture of the serpent over the entrance of his longhouse. When enemies try to enter the building they get the "fits" and die there.

A third account of the two-headed serpent is provided by Albert Louie, as part of a set of instructions that he received from his grandfather on how to behave around ponds and lakes:

> And he told me another little pond, "Don't go there—there's a big snake there, a snake there with two heads on." He says, "Don't go there. If you ever see it," he says, "you just twist around like that and you die from it."
>
> WELLS: Yeah, I think Dan Milo told me about this one.
>
> LOUIE: They call it sí:lhqey. It's got a head on him like that; long mouth; and it got—I see'd a picture. It's got long ears like a horse, like a horse's ears. It's got a nose, and it's got teeth in it like an alligator, you know.
>
> WELLS: Do you know the story?

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> LOUIE: Well, I seen it once, but it was not so big, about that size. I was hunting, and I seen the thing way in the deep water. My god, his eyes just like fire. My god, I see that thing. I was shooting ducks, you know, and I passed by. About two hours after, I came back in the same way, and the thing was going about as far as where you are. I could see it went so fast. I seen it. I seen it with my own eyes. It didn't bother me. I didn't get crazy from it. I wasn't looking for the thing, you know. I guess he knows I wasn't. [Wells 1987:157]

The above information is of particular interest in that it provides a rare eyewitness account, from a man who is described as "one of Oliver Wells's most valuable informants" (Wells 1987:155).

Wells (1987) also provides a facsimile (p. 157) of two pages (including two illustrations) from Wells's *Myths and Legends of the Staw-loh Indians of South Western British Columbia* (1970), together with a facsimile (p. 158) of Wells's transcription of the tape recording that contains the information in the two reprinted pages. These two pages basically confirm details about the appearance and behavior of *sítɬqəy* as recounted above, but add the detail that one can kill it by pulling out one's hair and blowing the hair at the creature (a variant of the chewed grass method mentioned in Dan Milo's account). *Sítɬqəy* is then identified as a *sƛ̓'élaqəm* (<slalakum> in Wells's transcription [1987:159]), i.e., a supernatural being, described by Albert Louie as "a spirit in the lake, a kind of different kind of animal, or fish, or whatever it is" (see also section 2.1 in this connection).

Duff (1952:118–19) briefly mentions the two-headed serpent in his account of the Upper Stalo, with a description recorded from "Robert Joe," almost certainly the same person as Wells's consultant "Bob Joe":

> It comes to the surface of small lakes and shoots a head out each end. Its body is a black sphere about 4 feet in diameter. The heads are round, about 6 inches in diameter, with round ears and red circles on the top. The farther out it sticks its heads, the smaller the central body part gets. It makes a noise like a duck, but much louder. One was seen in *laɬíc*, a little lake on Lihumitson Creek (a tributary of Chilliwack River). If you saw that animal in the water, you daren't turn around, because if you did you'd keep twisting until you were dead. [Duff 1952:118]

Duff (1952:119) relates the two-headed serpent to the Lummi and Songhees <Sinetlqi> (see also section 2.1), to the Nootka <Haeitlik> 'Lightning-snake', and to the Kwakiutl <Sisiutl> (for the last, see also section 5). Duff transcribes the name of the serpent both as *síχqi* (p. 118) and as *síxqi* (p. 119), each probable misrecordings of *sítɬqəy*. (At the beginning of his career, Duff's ear was apparently not yet attuned to the phonetics of Salish: he writes *sƛ̓'élakəm* with *k* [p. 117] where other [and, in this respect, more reliable] sources have *q*; see section 2.1.)

Hill-Tout (1904), as reprinted in Maud (1978, 3:142–45), recorded a Chehalis (Upriver Halkomelem) myth in which a group of mythical people called the

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"Seetlkai" (i.e., *sítɬqəy*) give "twisting" power to a young man whom they have saved from drowning. The young man uses this power to "twist" his enemies (those who tried to drown him). He later restores them to life, reconciles with them, and helps them in catching a *sx̌'éləqəm* who has been stealing their possessions. There is no mention in this myth of what the *sítɬqəy* look like.

The Cowichan dialect of Halkomelem has *sínəɬqəy?* for the two-headed serpent, as quoted in Kuipers (1967:305) from Elmendorf and Suttles (1960). This form is almost identical to the Squamish form (see section 2.3) and agrees with Kuipers's remark (1967:246) that of the three Halkomelem dialects treated by Elmendorf and Suttles—namely, Cowichan, Musqueam, and Chilliwack—the first is phonetically closest to Squamish.

2.3. Squamish. Kuipers (1967:230–36) contains an extremely interesting account of the two-headed serpent (called *sínuɬqay?* in Squamish), in the form of an original Squamish text followed by an exemplary English translation.[4] In summary, the text relates the following events: a man by the name of *x*^{w}*áč'tál?*, who is given to sloth and squalor, sets out to pursue *sínuɬqay?* (defined as "name of a mythological two-headed serpent" [p. 305]). The quest takes several years, and finally, after much ritual cleansing, the man receives a vision in which *sínuɬqay?* instructs him to take four pieces of pitch (possibly four pieces of pitchwood) and pierce each head of the serpent with two pieces. Upon doing so, he faints and falls into the water. When he comes to, he finds himself on higher ground because the water has risen (cf. Bob Joe's account in section 2.2 for the rising of the water). *X*^{w}*áč'tál?* waits until *sínuɬqay?* has decayed, then picks out a bone that the serpent has said that he could use against enemies and for finding food. When returning to his village, he brandishes the bone at the inhabitants of the villages that he passes through, striking them all with convulsions, then reviving them again by touching them with the same bone. He does the same when he has reached his own village, reviving all but his wife, who has remarried in his absence, and her husband.

Interestingly, the name *sínuɬqay?* combines with feminine articles in the Squamish text, except in sentence 7, where the "plain" (nonfeminine) article *ta* is used, rather than the expected *ɬa*, the feminine article. Possibly we have a printing error here, or a slip of the tongue by Kuipers's consultant, Louis Miranda (which would have been unusual for this excellent speaker and teacher of Squamish). Kuipers correctly refers to *sínuɬqay?* as "she" and "her" throughout the translation.

Under the dictionary entry for *x*^{w}*áč'tál?*, Kuipers notes that according to Alec Peters (a Squamish consultant), *x*^{w}*áč'tál?* was the original name of *sínuɬqay?* (1967:348).

As Kuipers remarks (1967:219), there is a fuller English version of this story in Hill-Tout (1900), reprinted in Maud (1978, 2:73–76). A similar account is given in Wells (1987:144–45), where Wells interviews a Squamish consultant,

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August Jack. Wells (1987:183–84) also contains a story recorded from another Squamish consultant, Dominic Charlie, and, in the second part of this story, a sea serpent is killed with four sticks of pitchwood. Other versions of the accounts in Wells (1987), from the same consultants, are also given in Wells (1966).

3. Preliminary conclusions. In this section, we draw a number of conclusions from the preceding descriptions of the spirit-serpent, with regard to its function and appearance, and the etymology of its names in various languages.

3.1. Function and appearance. Although the various accounts of the spirit-serpent vary in their details, they show some recurring themes. These include: (1) the spirit's general appearance in the form of a large animal, usually a snake and, in that case, quite often a snake with a head on each side of its body; (2) association with water fowl; (3) injunction against shying away from the serpent once it has been encountered (this is actually a general instruction to those who seek encounters with supernatural beings); (4) risen water after the encounter; and (5) the power to "twist" people into deadly convulsions (the serpent will do this either to those who shy away from it, as in the Lummi account in section 2.1, or, with nonlethal consequences, to those who seek its power, as in Jenness's account in section 2.2; the same power can be acquired by those who successfully seek the serpent's help, together with the power to undo the twisting, as in the Squamish account).

Note that only for Straits, Halkomelem, and Squamish is the serpent explicitly described as two-headed. I did not record this detail from my Lillooet consultants, although it is possible that this feature went unmentioned in the Lillooet accounts.

3.2. Etymology. It is obvious that the various terms for the spirit-serpent are closely related. As we have seen in section 2.2, the Mainland Halkomelem form (*síɬqəy*, with variants) is a syncopated form of what can be tentatively reconstructed as *sínuɬqay'* (with a problematic *u* for *i* in the Lillooet form). The Lillooet form has *z'* developed out of *y'* as part of a sound shift that affected both Lillooet and Thompson (Thompson 1979:705).[5] The glottalization status of the final consonant is somewhat problematic, with transcriptions and dialects disagreeing, but it has no bearing on the overall analysis of the word.[6] The sequence *-uɬqay'* or *-əɬqəy*, and its reflexes, is obviously related to a rather common Coast Salish word for 'snake': *ʔə́ɬqayʔ* in Squamish (Kuipers 1967:305, 308), *ʔə́ɬqəyʔ* in Cowichan (Kuipers 1967:388), *ʔéɬqəy* in Upriver Halkomelem (Galloway 1980:72; we also have the variant *ʔéɬqɛy* in Galloway 1979:25), *sʔáɬqaʔ* and *sʔáɬqəʔ* in Samish (Galloway 1990:69), *sʔaɬqəʔ* in Saanich (Montler 1991:9), and *ʔúɬqay* in Sechelt (Timmers 1977:9).[7] The first part of our reconstructed form, *sin-* (*sun-* in Lillooet, *sʔin-* in Suttles's Lummi form) is more problematic. A connection with the Proto-Salish root for 'to turn, spin',

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reconstructed as *sal* in Kuipers (1970:60), is not impossible, especially if one thinks of the "twisting" effect that the serpent or its power can have, but one is still left with a troublesome vocalism and the rather unusual change *l* > *n* (*n* > *l* is more common; see Thompson 1979:706). A connection with the Proto-Salish root for 'two', given as *ʔəsál(-aʔ)* in Kuipers (1970:70), is not a priori excluded either, but still presents its own complications (aside from the fact that *sal* and *ʔəsál(-aʔ)* are probably related; cf. English *twine* and *two*). Further research is needed in this area.

Since most information on the serpent is found in literature on the contiguous Squamish-Halkomelem-Straits area, and since the word is at least partially analyzable in these languages through a connection with the term for 'snake', it is probable that both the belief and the term—tentatively reconstructed as *sínułqay'*—originated in this area, and then spread to the Lower Lillooet area, i.e., Mount Currie and more southern settlements.[8]

4. The two-headed snake by other names. In the preceding sections, we have concentrated on *súnułqaz'* and its etymological counterparts in three Salish languages, and we have seen that for the Straits-Halkomelem-Squamish area it is described as a two-headed serpent whose most striking power is the ability to twist people and break their bones. Outside the Straits-Halkomelem-Squamish area the two-headed serpent also occurs, but here its "twisting" ability, if mentioned at all, does not seem to be its major power. Also, the linguistic and anthropological classifications diverge here, in that the two-headed serpent goes by various unrelated names that have been recorded for a number of Coast Salish cultures. Thus, Barnett, in his monograph on the Coast Salish of British Columbia, gives the following description:

> Differences existed between the animal spirits conferring powers upon seekers. Some spirits were "stronger" than others. The strongest of all was the mythical serpent, and an encounter with it caused the person to be knocked over unconscious and to bleed from all the apertures of his body. There was a gradation from this monster to the weaker common spirits. [1955:145]

Barnett continues his discussion as follows:

> The mythical serpent gave power almost exclusively to shamans. There were two kinds of serpents: the double-headed and the single-headed lizardlike monster. The former was called sinαLke in the south and aixos in the north; the latter (when the distinction was made) was known as tcinαkwa in the south and tcinko in the north. Both were whizzing, whining, flying beasts that lived in the water, but they sometimes appeared on land. They could split rocks in passing through them. If an unprepared person saw one or even crossed its trail on land, his arms, legs, and neck contorted awfully and he died. Both serpents had scales. Some thought that they had small feet; others said that they had wings; still others described them as having horns or a mane. One form was associated with lightning. It was pursued by the thunderbird, and it split trees when it

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> struck them, leaving scales and bark lying about which were dangerous for the layman to touch. Other spirits pertaining almost exclusively to shamanism were the thunderbird, fire, and the land otter. [1955:147]

The <sinαLke> is, of course, *sínuɬqay'* (or its various cognates). The <aixos> (*ʔáyhus* in standard phonemic transcription) is attested for the Sliammon (Mainland Comox), who believed in the two-headed serpent as one of several guardian spirit powers that a young man might encounter during his spiritual training (Kennedy and Bouchard 1983:85). Kennedy and Bouchard give the following description of the powers granted by the serpent to a warrior:

> There is another story about the time when the Lekwiltok [a subgroup of the Kwakiutl—JvE] were raiding around Lund. There was a Sliammon warrior who had *áyhus* ('double-headed serpent') for his guardian spirit power and was very well known for his skills in battle. During a big potlatch he would demonstrate his superior power by having his head cut off and placed in the corner of the house opposite from his body. While the singers beat time and sang this man's song, his head would move across the floor, finally rejoining his body. And not a mark could be seen on his neck! [1983:90]

Kennedy and Bouchard also discuss an island named *áyhus,* which is indeed shaped like a two-headed serpent (1983:164). M. Dale Kinkade (p.c. 1992) has brought to my attention the fact that the now extinct Pentlatch had <ai'hōs> (as spelled in Boas's original materials) for "Sisiutl."

The word *áyhus* may be related to Lushootseed *ʔáʔayhus,* as described in Collins's book on the Upper Skagit: "Near the juncture of the Suiattle with the Sauk lived a dangerous supernatural being ʔáʔayhus who is described as an 'animal.' People who encountered this being in the woods might die" (1974: 214).[9] If *ʔáʔayhus* is indeed related to *ʔáyhus* (a possibility made feasible by the fact that reduplication of word-initial consonant and vowel is a well-attested process in Lushootseed), we must revise Barnett's observation that *ʔáyhus* is limited to the northern part of the Coast Salish area (bearing in mind, however, that Barnett limited his scope to British Columbia, which excludes the Lushootseed).

Aside from *ʔáʔayhus,* the Upper Skagit also recognized the two-headed serpent, described as follows by Collins:

> The two-headed snake, sulwáʔus, was one of the most highly regarded of shamanistic spirits. One of my friends, whose grandfather had this power, said that she had influenza while she was attending Chemawa, a Federal Indian school in Oregon. She was in the infirmary, sitting up in bed. She felt something about her waist, looked down, and saw her grandfather's two-headed snake looking up at her. She was greatly relieved and immediately began to feel better, becoming well soon. When she got home, she asked her grandfather about the spirit. He said that he had known she was sick and had sent the spirit to make her well. This snake spirit was associated with the rainbow and also with thunder. [1974:169–70]

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In her index, Collins lists the name of the two-headed snake as *sulwəʔas* (no stress indicated) (p. 264). Yet another spelling, *səlwáʔus*, also occurs (p. 182), where she refers to the two-headed snake as the shamanistic spirit of the old man who cured his granddaughter in the incident quoted above. Collins further lists *sulwáʔus* (*sic*) as one of the three shamanistic spirits of the same man, who was in his late nineties in 1942 (p. 173). She lists *səlwáʔus* (*sic*) as an example of a name of a guardian spirit, which is then adopted by the person who is under the protection of that spirit (p. 220).

Furthermore, with regard to the Lushootseed (who comprise many subgroups), there is the following brief reference in Smith's monograph on the Puyallup-Nisqually: "A two-headed snake, yellow or dark brown, was occasionally seen, which, if cut apart, rejoined. This or any other abnormal animal appearance, *xwéxwit*, also indicated the approaching death of the beholder" (1940:127; note also the parallel with cutting apart and rejoining as related in the excerpt from Kennedy and Bouchard [1983]). Finally, Haeberlin and Gunther have the following entry on the double-headed snake in their study of the Indians of Puget Sound (in principle entailing the entire Lushootseed area, although the authors concentrate on the Snohomish and Snuqualmi):

> Yi'lqē'd was a double headed snake, ten feet long and very thin in the middle. When Little Sam [described as "a powerful shaman" on p. 47—JvE] saw this snake it was surrounded by a large number of other snakes who were all his slaves and children. They were coiled up in four piles. Little Sam jumped over these piles of snakes and grasped yi'lqē'd. Then he slept with the snake for two days and two nights. In this way he obtained the spirit. [1930:80][10]

A belief in the two-headed serpent seems to have been prevalent among the Thompson (*nɬeʔképmx*) as well, although there does not seem to be a special name for this being in the Thompson language. The most important source of information here is York, Daly, and Arnett (1993), which is mainly concerned with the analysis of a large number of petrographs in the Stein River Valley, in the light of traditional Thompson cosmology and mythology. Amy Hance, one of their consultants, as confirming that she knew of this animal, identifying it as <klu'biíst> (the Pacific Rubber Boa, see also below). The description then continues with an account from Annie York:

> Annie York did not identify any of the two-headed snakes at EbRk2 [one of the petrograph sites—JvE] as klu'biíst. She interpreted them in two different ways, sometimes as abstract "trail notations" about weather conditions, and sometimes as cultural symbols relating to the double-headed serpent, good fortune and greed. She did, however, identify another prominent image at the same site, the so called "Stein Owl," as the klu'biíst, or, as she called it, "slug snake," in its dream form representing a powerful winged hunting spirit and the harbinger of death. [York, Daly, and Arnett 1993:114]

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This is followed by the actual petrographs under discussion (p. 115). Interestingly, the two-headed snake is shown as having two pairs of legs, with the feet on each pair pointing towards the corresponding head. This image is then analyzed by York:

> That big creature low down, that looks like an alligator. It's a sea animal. You can tell by its shape. That's the head [left], and that's the tail [right]. And the little lines on the body show the shell. All those seafoods got shells. Both ends are the same! It can have a head at either end. When the earth began it was like that. The animals were strange, until the Creator fixed them. This man got a wife like that back then. She's got a head on both ends! So when she was gonna have a baby there was no kids. So X̲wekt'x̲wektl [a Transformer—JvE] took a cherry wood. Cut it all into ribbons. You know cherry wood. After you get through cutting it, it goes all like this. Goes into a coil. So she took that when she's in labour, but she can't bring the kid around, so she took that thing and she bit herself right in the stomach to disappear her other head. Then she was confined and she bring the baby. [York, Daly, and Arnett 1993:116]

York then continues her account, leading to a discussion of the other petrographs on the same site. There are many more references to the two-headed snake in the remainder of the book, including a mention of the Halkomelem *sílhqey*, in the spelling <silh'qey> (p. 145) with the following information added by York:

> They got heads in both ends. Anyway, this two-head, he's got a head at each end and he can run both ways, run backwards or forwards. He's got spines on his back and that's why people don't like it. But it's a creature that goes with a water dream. It's a serpent thing. Associated with water, yes. You see the tiny little ones like that in the water sometimes. It's a thing like that that's got lots of legs.
>
> Its baby, you see, has only one head. The second generation is like that, it changes. I don't know the name of the two-head, but this one I know. [York, Daly, and Arnett 1993:145]

York then continues with a description of the water animal that she does know, which appears to be a type of water lizard with one head, although "Some of them has two heads, one in front, one behind." An illustration shows a petrograph of a three-meter-long double-headed serpent with land animals on one side and what appear to be sea creatures on the other (pp. 160–61). York's comments are: "There's the two-headed snake again. Long, long one, dividing the worlds. It divides the sea, the salt water from the fresh water, the animals from the fish. Everything" (p. 161). York then concludes: "The two-head is the spirit of dividing, and it is his luck. It turns everything halfway" (p. 161).

As for the Shuswap, I can only find two brief references to a two-headed snake. Dawson mentions that

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> The story of the existence of a kind of rattlesnake with a head at each end is common among the Shuswaps and several men I have met actually say they have themselves seen such snakes. The name of this creature is *wha-tloo-sil-i-kin*. To see such a snake is very unlucky and portends the death of a near friend. [1891:39]

Teit observes: "To see an axhluselhken snake (the kind sometimes nicknamed double-headed) foretells death" (1909:619).[11] The terms <wha-tloo-sil-i-kin> and <axhluselhken> are obviously related, and refer to the same animal, but it is impossible to reconstruct the true phonetics from these transcriptions. It is also doubtful that this animal is related to *súnuɬqaz'* and its cultural affiliates, since the former is water-based, while rattlesnakes (the basis of Dawson's [1891] account) are land-based. Intriguingly, Kuipers (1974:154) has a reference to *təɬáne* 'a mythical monster', which apparently lives in the water, as per *s-púmɬ-k^{w}e* 'any deep water where *təɬáne* lives' (p. 135). (The latter is noted as recorded in Kamloops, and commented on as a "doubtful item," unknown in Canim Lake or Deadman's Creek.) There is no information on the shape of this animal or on the next one, which is listed as *x-p'eʔs-úl'əx^{w}* 'a mythical snake which was believed to live deep in the mud' (p. 145).[12]

I have no information on the two-headed serpent in other Salish cultures, although a belief in this creature may exist, or may have existed, in these cultures. Kinkade (1991:291) lists *ʔactánuq'^{w}a* (a compound of *ʔúq'^{w}a* 'snake [Garter snake spp.]' and √*tan* 'to go, pass by') as 'mythological snake' for Upper Chehalis but gives no further information on the function of this being in the Upper Chehalis belief system.[13] Olson (1936:167) has a brief description of a mythological sea serpent in his monograph on the Quinault, but this being is in many aspects different from the two-headed serpent (it is described as a "water monster with a head like a deer, but a long body like a snake's, with feet near the head"). Animals like these should probably be classed with "other mythical snakes" discussed in section 5.

At this point we should consider the origin of the two-headed serpent in ontological terms: is it exclusively a part of the Salish mythological canon, or is it somehow based on a snake recognized within the western biological taxonomic system? As for the latter possibility, we have already seen above that Amy Hance (a consultant for York, Daly, and Arnett [1993]) identifies depictions of the two-headed serpent with the Rubber Boa or <klu'biist> (or *x̌'épiʔst* in Thompson and Thompson [1996:170, 1163]). This snake (of which we have beautiful illustrations in York, Daly, Arnett [1993:150], and in Carl [1968:26]) does have a tapered head, making it relatively difficult to distinguish its head from the tip of its tail.[14] The Rubber Boa is generally associated with death, either as a causer or a messenger (see York, Daly, Arnett 1993:149–50, 273). Among the Lillooet, where the Rubber Boa is known as *sx̌'ápl'əst* (spelled <La'piilst> in York, Daly, Arnett [1993], and etymologically related to *x̌'épiʔst*), we have the same belief (author's field notes, see also York, Daly, Arnett [1993:273] for

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further information, taken from Teit [1906]). It is very unlikely that the Rubber Boa is the model for the two-headed serpent. First of all, the habitat of the Rubber Boa lies for the most part east of the Straits-Halkomelem-Squamish area, i.e., east of the essential core area of the two-headed serpent.[15] Secondly, the function of the two-headed serpent as a shamanistic spirit, endowing its protégé with the power to "twist" an enemy, among others, is quite different from the death-announcing power of the Rubber Boa.[16]

5. Other mythical snakes. The belief in the two-headed serpent is part of a larger belief system that incorporates countless "supernatural" beings, a number of which are snakes of one shape or another. Barnett (1955, as quoted in section 4) mentions <tcinαkwa> and <tcinko>. These are listed as *sc'ínk'ʷa* (Cowichan) and *č'ínk'ʷu* (Squamish) in Kuipers (1967:321) and defined there as 'lightning monster' and 'name of a silver-scaled serpent that lives underground and is said to be pursued by the Thunderbird', respectively. Jenness (1955:60) gives Katzie *sc'ínk'ʷə* and defines it as 'lightning snake'. He then provides details on its appearance and behavior.

In the Squamish and Halkomelem cultural areas, we find yet another mythological serpent, in addition to *sínułqaý* and the others discussed so far. Thus, Kuipers (1967) refers under *ʔəɬqayʔ* (p. 388) also to *ʔlqáyʔ* (p. 336), described as a 'mythological (?) animal which moved along by rolling itself sideways along the hills' (information provided by Isaac Jacob). According to another consultant of Kuipers, Alex Peters, "If one crossed its path, one got sick with crippled, swollen feet. They are said to have been eaten by pigs when these were brought in by the white man" (p. 336). Similarly, Galloway lists Upper Halkomelem *ʔɛləqɛ́:y* (note the resemblance to Squamish *ʔlqáyʔ*) and describes it as 'slow-worm ("a slow-moving foot-long snake") (actually a blind, legless lizard, Anguis fragilis)', adding, "Someone related or close to you will die soon after you see it unless you throw it over your shoulder and tell it to go to someone else and you name them" (1979:25).

Throughout the Salish culture area there are many beliefs associated with nonmythological snakes, but a description of these beliefs falls outside the scope of this article. (Note, however, the discussion of the Rubber Boa in section 4.) More importantly, the distinction between the mythological and nonmythological cannot always be applied profitably to American Indian cosmologies. (This point is further discussed in section 6. See also the discussion on Squamish *ʔlqáyʔ* and Halkomelem *ʔɛləqɛ́:y* above, as an example of a being that seems to straddle the boundary between the mythological and nonmythological.) As an example of a non-identified snake with a supernatural function, consider the story in Teit (1912:269), about a young man who has a vision in which he is instructed to go to Spuzzum Creek and shoot arrows across the stream. Each arrow gets stuck on the last one shot, thus forming a stack. When he collects the arrows, he finds that the first one has killed a large snake by striking it between

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the eyes. Formerly, a poor marksman, the young man now becomes an excellent hunter, never missing a shot. This story has the now-familiar motif of obtaining "power" from a giant snake, but I doubt that a connection between this being and the two-headed serpent (or any of the other snakes discussed so far) is valid. For one thing, this story incorporates an element usually connected with ascension into the sky-world, namely, the forming of a bridge of arrows. A brief summary of reptiles in American Indian beliefs in British Columbia is given in Carl (1968:15–16).

Outside Salish, but adjacent to it, is the Wakashan cultural and linguistic area. As we have seen in section 2.2, Duff (1952:119) relates the Halkomelem two-headed serpent to the Nootka *Haeitlik* 'Lightning-snake' and the Kwakiutl *Sisiutl*.[17] The latter shows a striking resemblance to the Salish serpent, as evinced in the following description: "The Sisiutl had the power to assume many shapes; to see it or to touch it meant death, except to those who had its help" (Inverarity 1950, ill. 14; both the latter and ill. 78 are useful examples of traditional Kwakiutl depictions of *Sisiutl*). The non-Anglicized term for *Sisiutl* in Kwakiutl or, more properly, Kwakwala is *sisyuƛ*, *sisyuɬ*, or *sisyuʔɬ* (cf. Kwakwala *syɬ-* 'snake; to snake along'). John C. Rath (p.c. 1992) suggests a possible connection between *sisyuƛ* (and its variants) and *syt-* 'to split lengthwise (e.g., a falling tree)'. The connection with splitting would reflect the depiction of *Sisiutl* in traditional art (see the references to Inverarity [1950] above; for the Kwakwala lexical items, see also Lincoln and Rath [1980:170]).

Throughout a large part of the northwest area we find archaeological references to the two-headed serpent, in the form of petrographs (writings on rocks, usually executed in red ochre), pictographs (writings on other surfaces such as wood panels), or stone carvings. However, the heaviest concentration of such records is on the Coast (such as in the Gulf of Georgia region, as described in Gjessing [1952:70], with particular reference to figure 7 [p. 72]). With regard to the Interior record, York, Daly, and Arnett make the following observation on EbRk2, one of the petrograph sites in their study:

> The number of paintings of two-headed snakes at EbRk2 is remarkable. No other rock writing site in British Columbia has as many clear representations of this supernatural being. Only two other sites in the Interior have recognizable paintings of this creature and only one painting is represented at each site. At EbRk2 there are twelve—a strong visual statement of the importance of the two-headed snake at this particular locality: nowhere else in the valley are paintings of it found. On the coast, paintings of the two-headed snake exist at rock writing sites in the fjord country around Sechelt, Howe Sound and Burrard Inlet. [1993:114][18]

Fladmark (1986:101) has a picture of a bowl in the shape of a double-headed animal (identified as a "double-headed wolf-bowl" on p. 100) that was found near Lillooet in Fraser Canyon. The paucity of archaeological evidence for the two-headed serpent in the Interior (as compared with on the Coast), combined

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with the linguistic evidence given in section 3.2, seems to support the hypothesis that the belief in this being spread from the Coast to the Interior.

It seems tempting to interpret *sínułqay'* as an introduction from Wakashan mythology into Coast Salish mythology, considering the strong Wakashan influence on Coast Salish. However, the fact that the Coast Salish languages have a partly analyzable term for the spirit-serpent, rather than a Wakashan loan, does not support this interpretation. It seems more likely that *sínułqay'* is originally Salish, but possibly adapted some characteristics from *Sisiutl*. Interestingly, the Bella Coola (Nuxalk) recognize *Sisiutl*, but obviously as a being different from *sínułqay'*, which does not seem to occur in their mythology (for an account of Bella Coola *Sisiutl*, see Davis and Saunders [1980:94]).

6. The wider perspective. Like all American Indian cosmologies, Salish cosmology is rich and complex, encompassing a large set of Creation stories and religious instructions on how to function within one's natural environment. So-called supernatural beings are an integral part of this cosmology, although one should note immediately that from a Native point of view, "natural" and "supernatural" cannot be strictly separated, in that "natural" phenomena (animals, human, geographical features, weather, and so on) have their "supernatural" sides as well. These may function in vision quests, be endowed with special powers, and be subject to special injunctions. Also, beings that from a non-Native point of view would be classed as wholly mythical are from a Native point of view often just as tangible as—although more difficult to encounter than—humans or more commonly known animals like the bear, trout, or beaver. Julius Charles's observations in Suttles (1987), related in section 2.1, are particularly instructive in this respect. No treatise on Salish cosmology can be complete without a description of beings such as *súnułqaz'*, which defy western Linnaean classifications but are wholly accounted for within the American Indian worldview. Suttles's (1987) essay on the Sasquatch is an excellent treatment of such beings.[19] The present article aims to make a further contribution in this area.

Notes

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An earlier version of this article was presented at the Twenty-Seventh International Conference on Salish and Neighbouring Languages, 5–8 August 1992, Kamloops, British

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Columbia (van Eijk 1992). Both that version and the present have benefited from the insight and advice offered by many of my colleagues. In particular, I am grateful to M. Dale Kinkade, Brent Galloway, and Thom Hess for sharing their encyclopedic knowledge of Salish languages and cultures. The responsibility for this article, however, remains my own.

I also presented the main points of this article at a Saskatchewan Indian Federated College academic seminar in October 2000. I gratefully acknowledge the comments made by the participants at that seminar, in particular, those by Bryan Hillis of Luther College, University of Regina, who drew my attention to Ileade's (1958) study of snakes in comparative religion.

Thanks are also due to Mercedes Hinkson and an anonymous reviewer for *Anthropological Linguistics*, for their insightful comments on the originally submitted version of this article. I am particularly grateful to the second reviewer for directing me towards York, Daly, and Arnett (1993), which turned out to be an extremely rich source of invaluable information.

Finally, I wish to thank the staff at the library of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College and at the Interlibrary Loans section of the University of Regina library, for helping me with the bibliographical research for this article (and, in particular, for tracking down the almost impossible to find publisher's data for Wells [1966] and [1970]).

1. One of my consultants, Lloyd Williams (a fluent speaker of the language and a man of profound intellect), mentioned that he had heard Charlie Mack speak about the serpent and that he remembered its name as *súlucqaz'*. When I mentioned (without trying to correct him) that I had recorded the name as *súnułqaz'*, Lloyd (who is about two generations younger than Charlie) immediately concurred that the latter name was the correct one.

2. Lummi is a dialect of Northern Straits. For an excellent study on language and dialect variation in Straits, including a very nice map, see Montler (1999). For general, but very thorough, introductions to the Salish language family, see Thompson (1979) and Czaykowska-Higgins and Kinkade (1998), which also include richly detailed maps. A highly informative account of Salish as part of a Northwest Coast *Sprachbund* is to be found in Beck (2000), which also contains a map of the area.

With regard to the name *súnułqaz'* and its etyma, my article is a contribution to lexical reconstruction within Salish. The earlier version of this article (van Eijk 1992) is quoted in this connection in Czaykowska-Higgins and Kinkade (1998:58), with reference to similar studies on other lexical fields in Salish.

3. Stern capitalizes the initial of <Sinetlqi> but not that of <sinatlqi>. He also italicizes <sinatlqi> but not <Sinetlqi>.

4. Kuipers (1967:305, 348) capitalizes the initial letters of both *sínułqayʔ* and *xʷə́čʼtálʔ* in his text, but he does not capitalize them in the dictionary section. In order to standardize the Squamish transcriptions with those in the other Salish languages (except for Lummi; see note 3), I write all initial letters in lower case. I have also replaced Kuipers's lambda (for the voiceless lateral fricative) with *ɬ* (the standard symbol for this sound), and I have replaced the *i* plus subscript arch with *y*. The acute accent over a vowel (indicating stress) corresponds to the vertical stroke after the vowel in Kuipers. A glottal stop after a resonant corresponds to a glottalized resonant in the transcriptions of other Salish languages.

5. Phonetically, Lillooet *z* and *z'* are voiced, lax, and dental or (depending on dialect) interdental, fricatives, which phonologically pattern as glides (see van Eijk [1997:4] for details). Unfortunately, Beck (2000:161, 180, 182, 187), in an otherwise excellent article, transcribes these phonemes as *θ* and *θ'*, thereby incorrectly suggesting that Lillooet has voiceless interdental fricatives.

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6. For the doubtful status of glottalized sonorants as members of the Proto-Salish stock of phonemes, see Thompson (1979:718).

7. A quick glance at some Salish languages reveals that there is a lot of disagreement in the generic names for 'snake' outside the *ʔə́ɬqay'* area: Lillooet has *naǩʷít*; Thompson *sméyx* (Thompson and Thompson 1996:196); Shuswap *pəp'íʔse* (Kuipers 1974:145); Spokane *titiš=úleʔxʷ* (Carlson and Flett 1989:266); Colville Okanagan *xm-xmn=aw's=qn* and *k'ʷxʷ-k'ʷxʷap* (Mattina 1987:340); Lushootseed *bəc'ác* (northern) and *bə́c'əc* (southern) (Hess 1976:22); Upper Chehalis *ʔúq'ʷa* (Kinkade 1991:291, see section 4 for further information on *ʔúq'ʷa*); and Bella Coola *papink* (Nater 1977:12). A particular problem is presented by Coeur d'Alene *aɬq'íc'enč* (Reichard 1939:104, spelling mine), which Kuipers (1967: 388) relates to Squamish *ʔə́ɬqayʔ*, in spite of the fact that the Squamish form has plain *q* where Coeur d'Alene has glottalized *q'*.

8. For old contacts between the Lower Lillooet and the Coast Salish, see Teit (1906: 200, 231).

9. Collins's entry (1974:267) apparently confuses *ʔáʔayhus* with another being, namely, *ʔayíyus* 'a spirit helpful in finding lost souls'.

10. Thom Hess (p.c. 2001) informs me that <yi'lqē'd> is probably *yəl'qíd*, which would then mean '(the) other (*yəl*) head (*-qid*)'.

11. Both quotes are given in York, Daly, and Arnett (1993:273).

12. In the forms taken from Kuipers (1974), I replace the lambda with *ɬ*, and the k^o with k^w.

13. M. Dale Kinkade (p.c.) has brought to my attention that there is also Ogopogo (in Okanagan Lake), with a likely origin in the cosmology of the Okanagan. At the 1992 Salish conference in Kamloops, I was also informed by a Shuswap participant that according to his elders there was a giant snake in a nearby lake.

14. As Gregory and Campbell, put it, "Because of the similarity of head and tail, the Rubber Boa is frequently referred to as the 'two-headed snake'" (1984:70, quoted in York, Daly, and Arnett [1993:273]). Carl adds: "If alarmed it may roll itself into a ball with the head concealed and the tail raised up. In this position the tail can easily be mistaken for the head and for this reason it is sometimes called the Two-headed snake" [1968:27])

15. Carl describes the snake's habitat extending "west at least to Hope and Harrison Lake" (1968:27). This still puts its main habitat outside the coastal area.

16. Note that in the passage from York, Daly, and Arnett (1993:114), Annie York does not identify the two-headed serpent with the Rubber Boa. Instead, she remarks upon the two-headed serpent as a spirit who brings about separation (see the quotation from p. 161 above). In this connection, it is also important to note that there is a reference to a petrograph of another two-headed animal, with antlers on one head (pp. 192–93). The two-headed serpent may thus be part of a group of two-headed supernatural beings that are associated with duality or dichotomy.

17. The labels "Nootka" and "Kwakiutl" are now rejected by the groups formerly designated by these labels. They are used here solely because the reference quoted uses them. The "Nootka" prefer to be referred to as the Nuu-chah-nulth (which also includes the Ditidat), while the now preferred designation for the "Kwakiutl" is Kwakwaka'wakw.

18. The authors then quote Gjessing (1952), as referred to above, but for some reason incorrectly identify the petrograph with the two-headed snake as figure 6 rather than figure 7.

19. In this connection, I should also refer to Sharp's (1987) discussion of "Giant Fish, Giant Otters and Dinosaurs" in traditional Chipewyan culture, and to Goddard's (1985) article on apparently supernatural beings in traditional Fox and Miami accounts of historical events. Of course, snakes also play a major part in many religions outside the

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North American Indian culture area. A good source of information in this respect is Ileade (1958), particularly pages 163–71.

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